



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4604

January 23, 2019

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20500

Re: Ending the Government Shutdown's Harmful Effects Upon Farmers

Dear Mr. President:

The ongoing government shutdown is hurting millions of Americans from every walk of life; in Virginia's Fourth Congressional District, and across the country, countless farmers face especially harmful effects. Unless the government is swiftly and fully re-opened, the damage will only grow worse—with potentially grave consequences for both individual farmers and our national economy. I urge you to take swift action in order to minimize those harms.

Farmers, like any other businesspeople, need certainty and stability in order to prosper. Until the government fully re-opens, they will have neither—and the stakes are clear. In a January 13 news conference at the American Farm Bureau Federation's 100th annual convention, Farm Bureau president Zippy Duvall said the shutdown "is going to hurt our farmers."¹ Convention delegates "urged the administration and Congress to work together to end the government shutdown as soon as possible," noting that "farmers and ranchers are being delayed in securing loans and crop insurance as well as disaster and trade assistance" and that important 2018 Farm Bill provisions are not yet being implemented.²

Countless news outlets have shown the consequences for individual farmers, their families, and their communities. On January 9, for instance, *The Washington Post* explained what the shutdown has meant for a Virginia farmer named John Boyd. Boyd, the *Post* reports, "suffered as a result of the international trade war after Chinese purchases of soybeans — once 60 percent of the market — plummeted to next to nothing"; as a result, funds from a \$12 billion federal aid package have

become a lifeline. But with the government shutdown moving into its third week, Boyd was left waiting for his support check to arrive. Other farmers who still must have their crop totals approved by the government to receive aid were left with no way to apply for it. The delay has been the latest blow to a soybean farming community of

¹ Spencer Chase, "Duvall highlights trade, deregulatory action as key 2019 Farm Bureau issues." *Agri-Pulse*, <https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/11808-duvall-highlights-trade-deregulatory-action-as-key-2019-farm-bureau-issues>. January 13, 2019.

² "Farm Bureau Adopts Policies on Government Shutdown, Trade, Opioids, Cell-Based Food and Broadband." *American Farm Bureau Federation*, <https://www.fb.org/newsroom/farm-bureau-adopts-policies-on-government-shutdown-trade-opioids-cell-based>. January 15, 2019.

more than 300,000 that has suffered steep price declines and bad weather, leaving some to contemplate switching crops for the coming year — or getting out of farming altogether.³

Boyd himself calls the shutdown “a fiasco”: it is “really affecting us dramatically,” he says, and he is “not in financial shape to miss a whole planting season.”⁴

In the face of such serious problems, the Department of Agriculture’s recall last week of 2,500 workers was an inadequate fix. That move re-opened just under half of the nation’s 2,100 Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices; those offices were originally to open only for a three-day window, and to offer only a subset of the services that are available under normal conditions.⁵ Secretary Perdue’s announcement yesterday that all offices would re-open on Thursday, and that they would offer a greater range of services, was therefore welcome news for farmers; even so, many FSA-administered services and supports—including help with critically important loans, disaster relief, and conservation assistance—are still not being provided.⁶ Other crucial resources, including crop reports that farmers use to help make planting decisions, are likewise unavailable.⁷

And even limited service delivery is possible only because thousands of federal employees, at the FSA and elsewhere, continue to do their jobs without the benefit of regular pay. Just as farmers need and deserve certainty, so too do federal workers; these dedicated public servants should not have to worry about how they are going to make rent, put food on the table, or meet other basic needs for themselves and their families.

In the face of such harms, continuing this shutdown is unacceptable—and unsustainable. The House of Representatives has approved bipartisan legislation to re-open the government; I urge you to publicly endorse those measures, and to ask that the Senate take them up. Doing so would bring an almost immediate end to the shutdown—and to farmers’, federal workers’, and millions of other Americans’ needless suffering. Inaction, by contrast, will mean continued pain.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

³ Annie Gowen et al., “Already reeling from tariff war, some farmers aren’t receiving government support checks amid shutdown.” *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/already-reeling-from-tariff-war-farmers-arent-receiving-government-support-checks-amid-shutdown/2019/01/09/2403fca2-40a0-4cc2-8d9c-d4787edde1b4_story.html. January 9, 2019.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Jeff Stein, “Looking to help farmers hurt by shutdown, Trump administration recalls 2,500 USDA workers.” *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/looking-to-help-farmers-hurt-by-shutdown-trump-administration-temporarily-recalls-2500-usda-workers/2019/01/16/e166d6b2-19ac-11e9-88fe-f9f77a3bcb6c_story.html. January 16, 2019.

⁶ “Government Shutdown Information.” United States Department of Agriculture, <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/help/shutdowninfo>. Accessed January 22, 2019.

⁷ Jeremy Hill and Isis Almeida, “Shutdown Data Delay Is ‘Bad Deal’ for Farmers Who Need to Make Crop Plans.” *Bloomberg*, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-01-04/usda-data-delay-is-bad-deal-as-farmers-need-to-make-crop-plans>. January 5, 2019.